

Neighborhood Planning Process Guidelines

Neighborhood Services Department
City of Las Vegas

Pre-Planning Steps

When a neighborhood association wants to develop a long term plan for their neighborhood there are two pre-planning steps to complete:

1. Schedule a meeting with the Neighborhood Services Director to discuss the Neighborhood Planning Process; and
2. Form an ad hoc committee to explore the feasibility of completing a neighborhood plan.

Meeting with the Neighborhood Services Director

At the first meeting with the Neighborhood Services Director the Neighborhood Planning Process will be explained to those interested in completing a plan for their neighborhood. In particular, five items will be discussed:

- Purpose and Benefits of Developing a Neighborhood Plan;
- Neighborhood Plan Components;
- Commitment of Neighborhood Planning Team and Residents;
- Neighborhood Services Technical Assistance;
- Community Meeting Requirements; and
- Plan Development Process, Review and Approval.

Purpose and Benefits of Developing a Neighborhood Plan

The neighborhood planning process is a community driven process to develop a community plan that truly reflects the vision and aspirations of the neighborhood and results in a position statement for the neighborhood. The plan becomes an information source which any public or private group can consult.

Two principles are key to the neighborhood planning process: *collaboration and inclusiveness*. The goal is that the process will involve partnerships of public and private resources and partnerships among all the stakeholders in each neighborhood. Planning is a collaborative enterprise in which people in the neighborhoods will reach out to one another and work with staff to prepare plans that

outline neighborhood priorities while remaining consistent with City policy.

Neighborhood Planning Components

There are three basic components of the Neighborhood Planning Process:

- Neighborhood Plan Area;
- Neighborhood Planning Team; and
- Neighborhood Plan Document.

Neighborhood Planning Area

The Neighborhood Planning Area is the area for which the neighborhood plan is being developed. It must be large enough to include all the activity centers in the vicinity including local commercial/retail areas, local institutions, and residential areas. It should be large enough to be a "complete" neighborhood - a residential district plus surrounding activity centers such as retail, office, commercial, schools, etc. However, it should be small enough to have meaning to residents participating in the planning process. While perceived and defined by physical characteristics or visual landmarks, a neighborhood should share some common elements of identity or concern.

The Neighborhood Services Director will evaluate a proposed Neighborhood Planning Area by the following criteria:

- The neighborhood area is physically defined by natural or man-made boundaries such as major roads, railroad tracks, or types of similar development (or housing stock). Natural boundaries can include washes, natural elevations, depressions or other types of land forms.
- The neighborhood area needs to contain some common element of identity or concern. This can be expressed by residents and property owners as shared objectives or issues, shared association (military employees, historic area and so on) or similar socio-economic characteristics.
- The neighborhood area has a functional and meaningful size. It is large enough to contain the residential area being considered plus

the major activity centers that affect or impact it and therefore play an important role in addressing neighborhood change. Also, the area should be large enough to include adjacent parcels of land that might otherwise be unaddressed.

Neighborhood Planning Team

The Neighborhood Planning Team is a group of residents, property owners and business owners who volunteer to participate in the development of a neighborhood plan after attending an initial meeting of the neighborhood. The Director of Neighborhood Services shall evaluate and approve the Neighborhood Planning Team's composition and appropriateness to develop a neighborhood plan before the team begins the planning process.

Qualifications of the Neighborhood Planning Team

The team's size can range from five to fifteen members. At least 50 percent of its members must be property owners. A team's composition may contain less than 50% property owners only if it can be demonstrated that to the satisfaction of the Neighborhood Services and Planning Departments that efforts to involve property owners were unsuccessful and problems unique to the neighborhood justify the formation of the Neighborhood Planning Team with less than 50% property owners.

Members of the team must live, work, or own property in different areas of the neighborhood; geographic representation must be distributed uniformly throughout the neighborhood planning area.

Composition of the Neighborhood Planning Team

The team must be composed of community stakeholders including residents, local business people, rental property owners, and /or representatives from local institutions. Planning Team membership should represent all those interests present in the neighborhood which will play a major role in its future. It is important that the team does not **only** represent the local residential neighborhood association. Additionally, only one property owner or tenant per property parcel (or address) may hold membership on the team.

Neighborhood Plan Document

The Neighborhood Plan Document is the most important component. It should be a straightforward document that reviews existing conditions in a neighborhood, states plan goals and sets policy and project recommendations. To remain in effect, a Neighborhood Plan shall be reviewed and revised as necessary, but in no event shall it be reviewed and revised less than once every five years.

The Neighborhood Plan Document is the published record that identifies and expresses issues, policies and projects. It contains the data and information collected regarding existing conditions, community issues and concerns, analysis, and proposed strategies and recommendations to implement change.

Plan Format

A neighborhood plan format, at a minimum, needs to contain at least the following information:

- A description of the neighborhood, including the neighborhood planning area, and existing neighborhood conditions.
- A statement of neighborhood goals.
- A statement of recommendations to achieve these goals. Recommendations can take the form of strategies and action items.
- An action plan that prioritizes recommendations.

Plan Content

In developing a neighborhood plan, the team should consider the following areas of concern. The final plan, however, does not need to include comments on **all** of these areas:

- Land Use
- Housing
- Public Facilities and Services
- Quality of Life Public
- Quality of Environment
- Special Areas of Impact on the Neighborhood
- Traffic & Transportation

In addition to the items outlined above, a neighborhood plan may also make neighborhood specific recommendations on other issues of interest or concern to the neighborhood.

Commitment of Planning Team and Residents

In developing a Neighborhood Plan, there is a significant amount of time and commitment that is required on the part of the Neighborhood Planning Team. Going through a Neighborhood Planning Process involves many hours dedicated to meetings, recruiting volunteers, organizing, information gathering and writing the plan document.

Getting started in a planning process requires an initial organizing effort by a group of volunteers (ad-hoc committee) who are willing to lay the groundwork and spread the word about why and how to get involved in neighborhood planning. That, however, is only the beginning. The Neighborhood Planning Team will then need to schedule routine meetings to discuss strategies and possibly organize into sub-committees that will handle public relations, organizing community meetings, information gathering (by topics), and any other related task that needs to be addressed.

To run an efficient operation, it is recommended that the Neighborhood Planning Team elect a chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer (if needed) to keep the business affairs organized and to ensure that open meeting practices are followed.

Neighborhood Services Technical Assistance

The Neighborhood Services Department will provide technical assistance to neighborhoods that want to develop neighborhood plans. The Department works with the Neighborhood Planning Team to obtain necessary planning information, such as current zoning, land use, traffic counts, etc. Development of plan recommendations will rest with the neighborhood and the Neighborhood Planning Team. A staff planner will work with the team chair to provide necessary direction and technical assistance. The Department will provide the team with necessary base maps of the neighborhood planning area. The Department will also provide drafting and typing assistance in the development of the draft plan document and will print or reproduce sufficient copies of the plan for public hearings and neighborhood review.

Resources from the Neighborhood Services Department to participate in a neighborhood planning process will be allocated on a priority basis. Neighborhoods that demonstrate the following will be given consideration accordingly:

- where there is evidence of disinvestment, deteriorating housing conditions, high percentage of low income residents, and need for community facilities or neighborhood improvement;
- where the greatest degree of change is expected;
- where the existing conditions do not define a neighborhood identity;
- where a new neighborhood is planned; or
- where there is interest among the residents and businesses in an area to participate in a neighborhood planning process.

Community Meeting Requirements

This section identifies the necessary requirements that must be followed when setting up community meetings. These requirements are in place to ensure public meetings are open to the general public and proper notification takes place for each and every meeting.

Community Meeting Notification

At a minimum, the following must be adhered to in order to satisfy notification requirements. Notice of all neighborhood meetings during the plan development process will be satisfied if the guidelines below are followed accordingly.

- Notice of the meeting will be distributed throughout the neighborhood.
- Flyers will be distributed throughout the neighborhood by the ad-hoc committee.
- The committee members will need to make as much personal contact as possible in the neighborhood to encourage a good attendance at the meeting.

- Notices will be required in neighborhood and business newsletters, church bulletins, and local area newspapers, and should be placed in the community by the ad-hoc committee.
- The City, using the assessor's tax roll, will mail notices to all affected property owners.

Community Meeting Facilities/Location Requirements

It is required that open neighborhood meetings be held in an accessible public place. The meeting will be open to **all** who want to attend and all neighborhood residents, business people, and property owners will have equal voting rights.

Plan Development Process, Review and Approval

If the group that meets with the Neighborhood Services Director wishes to pursue developing a neighborhood plan, the group will need to form an Ad-hoc Committee. The Ad-hoc Committee will schedule and host the first neighborhood meeting and gain community support to proceed with a neighborhood plan.

Once a neighborhood plan has been completed to the satisfaction of these guidelines, the draft document will be submitted to the Neighborhood Services Department for the review process. The Neighborhood Services Department will be responsible for distributing the draft neighborhood plan to all appropriate departments for their review and comments. This informal review process is designed to help the Neighborhood Planning Team to verify that all the information presented in the document is current, accurate and correct.

The Neighborhood Services Department will then submit a final draft of the neighborhood plan for consideration before the Planning Commission and City Council. As part of the formal review and adoption process, public hearings will be scheduled to discuss the final neighborhood plan draft and proper notification will be given to all affected property owners. Once the Planning Commission and City Council has accepted the neighborhood plan to have satisfied all

requirements outlined within these guidelines, the plan may be adopted as an addendum to the City's General Plan.

Ad Hoc Committee

After meeting with the Neighborhood Services Director, an Ad-hoc Committee is formed to determine the feasibility of completing a neighborhood plan, to determine the neighborhood planning area boundaries and to prepare for the first neighborhood meeting.

Neighborhood Planning Area Boundaries

Defining the tentative planning area boundaries is one of the first tasks the Ad-hoc Committee must accomplish. The boundaries should reflect traditional neighborhood scale and character. A neighborhood planning area will include several neighborhood associations and/or business associations. Boundaries can be in the form of natural formations and/or man-made barriers (e.g. creeks, the wash, bridges) and should be inclusive of schools, churches, businesses, and multi-family residential. Be sure to review the Neighborhood Planning Area criteria outlined by the Neighborhood Services Director.

Neighborhood Planning Process Feasibility

To begin a Neighborhood Planning Process, it is important to identify the feasibility of doing a neighborhood plan for your community. This requires conducting an assessment of your community that identifies:

- the issues that the plan would address,
- the resources available to proceed with a Neighborhood Planning Process, and
- the level of commitment by the community stakeholders.

The Neighborhood Planning Process is a vehicle to produce a neighborhood plan designed to address several issues in a proactive manner. In turn, the document will be used as a guideline for officials to reference in making future decisions.

First Neighborhood Meeting Preparation

The Ad-hoc Committee is responsible for reaching out to the neighborhood and contacting as many stakeholders as possible to invite to the 1st neighborhood meeting. The Ad-hoc Committee will decide where to have the meeting, distribute flyers, prepare the agenda, and host the meeting. Public outreach can be in the form of flyers, radio announcements, newspaper advertisements, mailings, or any other effective means of getting the word out.

The Planning Process

First Neighborhood Meeting

Neighborhood residents, business people, and property owners will be notified of a general open neighborhood meeting to discuss the neighborhood planning process.

Meeting Requirements

The first open neighborhood meeting will be hosted by the Ad-hoc Committee with the assistance of the Department of Neighborhood Services. The meeting shall be structured to ensure reasonable and equal opportunity for participation from all interest groups in the neighborhood. A representative of the Neighborhood Services Department will moderate the meeting, explaining the Neighborhood Planning Process.

What Needs to Be Accomplished

A successful neighborhood meeting needs to accomplish three things:

- get support from the neighborhood;
- approve the neighborhood boundaries; and
- recruit a Neighborhood Planning Team.

Get Support From the Neighborhood

Community support in the Neighborhood Planning Process is imperative to the success and implementation of the entire process. Without it, the Neighborhood Plan would not truly reflect the vision of the

neighborhood as a whole and would not be an accurate record of the neighborhood's goals.

Neighborhood Plans are community driven and an expression of the community's vision, goals and desires. As a result, the neighborhood must come to consensus at the first community meeting to proceed with developing a Neighborhood Plan.

Approve the Neighborhood Planning Area Boundaries

The community must come to consensus on the proposed boundaries of a neighborhood planning area. Maps are the best tool to illustrate the area to be studied. Maps should be provided to all participants, demonstrating the proposed neighborhood planning area. Without consensus, the planning process cannot proceed.

Recruit Neighborhood Planning Team

At the first community meeting, the structure of the Neighborhood Planning Team and associated responsibilities will be presented to the public at large. Stakeholders needed to serve on the Neighborhood Planning Team will be identified and an open recruitment must occur so that a Neighborhood Planning Team can be formed.

Stakeholders are different for each neighborhood and reflect the diversity and uniqueness of each area. In identifying stakeholders, it is especially important to remember that people of all ages, ethnicities, races, income levels and interests be included.

Stakeholders will likely include residents; property owners and/or tenants; business owners; community organizations, social service providers and clients; workers; business organizations (e.g. chambers of commerce); schools and their students; major institutions (e.g. universities and hospitals); youth and seniors; religious institutions; developers.

In order to be recognized by the City and assisted in launching a planning effort, the Neighborhood Planning Team will have to demonstrate that it has made every effort to identify and contact representatives of organizations, groups and interests which are stakeholders in the community and has succeeded in involving a broad

spectrum in the organizing effort. For example, if the neighborhood demographics indicate that major stakeholders include business, industry, social services agencies and residents, the Neighborhood Planning Team should represent these interests.

Form the Neighborhood Planning Team and Develop Timeline

Neighborhood Planning Team

If the group attending the first open meeting reaches consensus about developing a neighborhood plan and approves the neighborhood planning area boundaries, the Ad-hoc Committee will recruit volunteers for the Neighborhood Planning Team. Volunteers will complete the form supplied by the Department. Reference the Planning Team Volunteer Form in the appendix. The ad-hoc committee will select team members in consultation with the Neighborhood Services Director using the qualifications outlined for team composition.

Timeline

Planning Team members will develop a timeline for plan development in consultation with the Director. The timeline will include proposed team meeting dates, community meeting dates, scheduled timeframe for data collection, analysis, and writing the document, as well as target dates for submitting the draft plan for reviews and adoption. Reference the appendix for a sample timeline.

As the plan is being developed, the Planning Team may request an amendment to the timeline from the Planning Commission. Amendments to the timeline will require the approval of the Planning Commission.

Collecting Information

The neighborhood planning process looks at what is happening inside and outside the neighborhood from a physical, social and economic perspective and requires various information in each of these broad

categories. This section outlines the different kinds of information that you can collect and possible information sources. It is not necessary to collect, nor may you be able to collect, all of the information listed below. The goal is to collect as much as is needed to understand the neighborhood so that you will be able to make good recommendations about its future.

Before collecting any information, it is a good idea to check with the Neighborhood Planning and Support Division to see what information is already available in the form of existing reports and/or studies that impact your neighborhood.

What Information Do You Need?

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis helps frame the conditions of the neighborhood.

It looks at:

- Strengths** - what are the strong elements of the neighborhood (e.g., active citizens, historic area, good schools).
- Weaknesses** - what are the weak elements of the neighborhood (e.g., deteriorated housing, inadequate park space, littered vacant lots).
- Opportunities** - what events or forces are positive for the neighborhood (e.g., a program to rehabilitate houses, a proposed retail center).
- Threats** - what events or forces represent threats for the neighborhood (e.g., a highway expansion, closing of a major retail center).

The Planning Team should do a SWOT Analysis at the beginning of the planning process. However, as information is collected about the neighborhood you will be able to update the initial analysis.

Types of Information

The following lists show some of the conditions, improvements and services you may want to look at when you decide what information you will collect. Your group may want to study all or only some of the

items, or you may want to add some conditions that are important to you but are not listed here. Once you have collected the information, you need to begin asking questions about what it means, which will be discussed in greater detail under the Information Analysis and Assessment section of these guidelines.

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of a neighborhood include the land, the environment and the landmarks of an area. These attributes help shape the character of a neighborhood. You may want to collect information about any of the following:

- land form - hills, drainage areas, flood plains, washes and general topography
- geologic hazards - faults or expansive soils
- undeveloped land
- scenic viewpoints
- air and water quality

Population

It is important to know something about the people who live in your neighborhood and also about the people who are moving in. For example, you would not want to plan for a "tot lot" in a neighborhood occupied with predominantly senior citizens. Some of the characteristics to consider are:

- number of people
- age of residents
- family size and make-up
- race
- sex
- education levels
- special groups such as senior citizens or female heads of households.

Land Use and Zoning

The City of Las Vegas has land use and zoning regulations that guide how property can be developed and used. Groups should look at the current uses, what uses are expected in the future and whether

different land uses conflict with each other. You may want to mark maps with colors to show current land uses such as:

- residential
- business
- industrial
- public

Housing

Houses are one of the basic building blocks of any neighborhood.

Many neighborhood improvement programs begin with housing conditions. Look at the conditions in different parts of your neighborhood to see if problems are widespread or limited to certain blocks. Look at your neighborhood for:

- homes needing repair
- dangerous homes and buildings
- types of housing
- percentage of homeowners and renters
- number of persons in each house or apartment

You may want to use charts, graphs or maps to record this information.

Community Facilities

Every neighborhood includes places that are shared by its residents.

Sometimes neighborhoods don't have enough facilities to meet the demand of people living in an area. Find out what facilities your neighborhood has and what it still needs. These are some of the most common neighborhood facilities:

- community centers
- senior centers
- social service centers
- day care centers
- centers for people with disabilities
- group homes
- schools
- medical facilities
- libraries
- fire stations

- parks
- parking lots

Be sure to note if these facilities are accessible for people with disabilities. Use a map to show where the facilities are located.

Transportation

How do people get around your neighborhood? Find out where they want to go and how easy or difficult it is to get there. Some of the conditions that affect transportation are:

- street conditions
- sidewalk conditions
- curb ramps
- alley conditions
- traffic flow
- bus routes
- bike paths

All of this information can be mapped. You may want to compare a facilities map with a transportation map to see if people have easy access to the places they want to go.

Economy

Every neighborhood has an economy, and you should have an idea of how it works. Many government programs are only available for certain income groups, so you may want to find out what the annual family income is for your neighborhood. Some characteristics you may consider studying include:

- annual family income
- unemployment rates
- availability of shopping
- condition of businesses and business districts

Some of this information may be most useful in chart form and some may be best plotted on maps.

General Physical Condition

The Neighborhood Planning Team might want to collect a number of items of information about physical environmental conditions that strongly contribute to neighborhood satisfaction or dissatisfaction - trash, unpaved alleys, broken sidewalks, trees in need of trimming or replacement, potholes, and vacant, unkempt lots.

Basically, direct observation will give the best results here, although some city agencies (e.g., public works) may be helpful.

History

The point of recounting the neighborhood's history is to strengthen the neighborhood's identity by providing an understanding of where the neighborhood came from, what has been its uniqueness, what role has it played within the whole city's story, what from the past can be built on for the future.

Learning for the first time that some famous person was born there may provide a theme or image if the neighborhood seems to lack one. Sometimes this search turns up a name for the neighborhood that no one had ever heard of before, and which sounds better than the one currently in use.

The public library will probably be the single most helpful source, but others would be state, county, and local historical societies, a university history department, and the local newspaper's archives. Do not forget to consult the informal neighborhood historian who's lived there many years.....and maybe has never been asked to tell the neighborhood's story. Telling stories about the neighborhood can be a wonderful tool for turning up little-known information, while giving many people, who may have thought they had nothing to contribute, a real opportunity to make a contribution.

Social Analysis

Unless a community survey has been done, data for this section may be rather sparse. Nevertheless, it is a crucial area to cover, because it moves beyond the demographic data and starts to say what kind of place this is to live. Items that might be included here start with an

assessment of the quality of life, which can be derived from data already discussed (e.g., amenities available, quality of the housing neighborhood aesthetics, income, and unemployment).

A second area to look into is sense of community. Do people know one another, do they even talk to one another, do they help one another, is there a viable and effective neighborhood organization, are there manifestations of pride in the neighborhood, are there shared symbols?

A third item to identify is the heart and soul of the community. The heart and soul is a physical as well as an intangible thing: it may be a particular place of importance, like those identified in the urban design section, or it may be an informal group of retired people who hang out at the park, or a certain symbol that everyone recognizes and uses.

Fourth, you might try to describe the political climate in the sense of organizations where collective decisionmaking goes on (e.g., neighborhood organization, strong precinct groups, or lodges), the forms of political life (e.g., a lot of organized activity versus everybody acting on their own), and the climate (conservative to progressive, active to passive, very unified to very fractured, or high versus low voter turnout).

Direct observation and group discussion, supplemented by some interviews, would prove most useful here.

Methods For Collecting Information

There are a variety of sources and techniques for collecting information. Unfortunately, not all sources have good, solid information. The goal is to get the best information available or try to create it if it is not available. However, do not exhaust everyone in trying to track down what cannot be found. To assist in information collection, several information collection techniques are listed below.

Research

Various studies and documents may contain statistical information about your neighborhood. *"Las Vegas In Focus..... Ward Demographics for the City of Las Vegas"* and *"Growth Watch"* are two sources of information that are published by the Planning Department. Additionally, the City's Comprehensive Plan summarizes much of the statistical information and much more is available from Census reports. Check with the Neighborhood Planning and Support Division to see if the information you need is already available. A review of these documents will give you much of the information you may want or need.

Surveys

Conducting surveys are probably the best form of collecting information that is not already compiled. Additionally, surveys can ensure the information is current and relevant to existing conditions.

- ***Windshield Surveys*** are just that, collecting data through the windshield of your car. This is effective when there is a lot of area to cover and using an automobile is the most efficient way to accomplish that task at hand. Organize a group of individuals who will drive down every street in the neighborhood listing information about the condition in the area. Pre-printed forms and/or checklists are helpful for individuals to record the conditions they see and will help in compiling the information. For example, surveyors could check the number of houses in a block that need repair.
- ***Door-to-door Surveys*** require individuals to walk door-to-door and are effective when talking with individual residents is the only way to obtain certain types of information such as how people feel about their neighborhood or how they perceive their neighborhood's condition. Survey questions can be open-ended such as "What would you like changed in your neighborhood?" or specific such as "Should the vacant lot on 4th Street be left natural or developed into a park?" It is best to have the surveyor interview the resident, but if that is not possible, the surveyor can leave the

form for the resident to complete later. Be sure to include a date and time of when you will return to pick up the form.

- ***Mail-Out Surveys*** are also an effective tool to obtain information about your neighborhood. Printing a survey form and mailing or delivering it to residents is another way to gain feedback. Be sure you have clear instructions, including the return address for mailing back the survey. The major drawbacks to this type of survey are the cost of mailing to residents and the small number of people who will take the time to return the survey on their own.

Meetings

Town hall or neighborhood meetings generate an invaluable amount of information. Let people know about the meetings through flyers, mailings or telephone calls. Be sure to give them the time, date place and subject of the meetings. Have a definite topic to be discussed and stick to the topic until the issue is resolved. Hold other comments until the end of the meeting. Keep written notes or tape the meeting, so you can put the information into a usable form later.

Using Collected Information to Identify Issues

Information Analysis and Assessment

The plan you eventually draft will be only as good as the information on which it is based and the analysis of that information. Once all the information has been collected, the Neighborhood Planning Team must sit down and start to sort through it. One way to organize the information is by categorizing the information by the different headings as previously stated or by the SWOT categories. There, however, are many other ways to slice the pie as well. If some data is available on a block-by-block basis, you may be able to pin-point certain blocks where the data suggests problems.

Creating new categories that cut across the formal ones, may prove useful (e.g., things we like, things we dislike, attractive things, ugly things, too many, or too few). Once the categories have been created,

then look at the data, and write down key points within each category. The temptation at this point is to drift into goal-setting. It is suggested you resist this temptation and focus on analyzing and assessing, because that will lead the way into goal-setting very quickly and with greater clarity.

A very useful way to see what the data contains is to plot some of them on maps, simply writing little notes at the appropriate locations on the map (e.g., congested intersection, cut through traffic, great view of downtown).

Another way to organize the information for presentation and future use is to prepare briefing papers that pull together, ideally in one or two pages, the key points about a given issue (e.g., crime/safety) and identify some of the choices that need to be made. The briefing paper **should not** suggest which choice should be made, but rather "here's the issue, here is the existing situation, and here are some areas in which we have got to make some decisions."

Once you have collected your information, you need to figure out what it means. These questions and other will help guide your discussions:

- How do neighborhood conditions compare to the rest of the City?
- Are conditions stable or changing?
- What conditions are dangerous to health or safety?
- What conditions affect the largest number of people?
- What services or facilities are not available?
- Are conditions a serious problem or just a minor inconvenience?
- Do a lot of people in the area recognize a common need?
- What facilities or services are inadequate to meet the need?
- Are there large groups, such as female heads of households, with special needs?
- What conditions have a negative effect on neighborhood morale or attitude?

The conclusions you reach during these discussions will help you identify the pertinent issues affecting your neighborhood. In turn, the neighborhood plan will further define the issues by establishing

community goals, devising strategies and forming recommendations to address these issues.

Categorizing Your Neighborhood

Planners often devise sets of categories for neighborhoods that assist them as they look across the city at different neighborhoods, trying to figure out general strategies that can help several similar neighborhoods at once. This same practice can assist your planning teams efforts in understanding what kind of neighborhood yours is.

Here is some standard terminology:

- developing (new neighborhoods)
- redeveloping (undergoing some big changes)
- stable (holding its own, not experiencing any dramatic change), and
- declining (experiencing real problems)

Another set of terms and/or categories that are more descriptive than judgmental, consists of:

- *Community* - large, well-known district, recognized by outsiders as one area, but which has internal subareas of some importance to residents.
- *Old established neighborhood* - an older area, often having a distinct ethnic flavor and rich traditions.
- *Outlying neighborhood* - a less urbanized, recently annexed area of the city.
- *Mixed land use neighborhood* - a neighborhood that has within its boundaries large sections of land devoted to industrial, commercial, institutional, or highway use.
- *Strictly residential neighborhood* - an area, often bound by arterial streets with commercial use, but having within the area no land uses but residential ones, except for a school, church, or small grocery store.
- *Residential enclave* - a small cluster of homes, which is isolated physically and probably socially from the rest of the community; often adjacent to, if not surrounded by, industrial or highway uses.

In attempting to categorize your neighborhood, you will probably find yourselves looking closely at data such as land use, changes in zoning,

residential turnover, and income. Still, the process is rather judgmental. Just make sure there has been ample discussion so that the judgment represents a consensus.

Displaying Information

Your planning team can display information in narrative paragraphs, tables, maps, and other visual displays. Information most suited to narrative presentation would be the history of the neighborhood, the social analysis, and the descriptions of community services available. Some of the information that would go well in table form are the demographics, economic base data, and circulation data. Maps work well for displaying data about land use, zoning, community facilities, and housing conditions. Do not let these suggestions, however, constrain your creativity in arriving at new and different ways to display what you have discovered.

In each case of displaying information, the map, chart, table, etc. should be done with the greatest amount of expertise available. If there is a professional engineer, architect, planner, or artist working on the project, that person should probably do them, sharing expertise along the way. If none of these individuals are involved, the team will need to do the work on their own to the best of their abilities. Do not overlook expertise you might find in your own backyard, however, in the form of volunteers.

Narratives

Narratives should be in a "user-friendly" format using short, punchy sentences and avoiding technical terms or jargon. When writing the document, it is important to remember who your audience is. The document does not need to read like a technical text book, but do use a vocabulary that has some precision to it.

Tables

In constructing tables, keep them simple. It's better to have several tables, each with one or two items of information than complex ones which try to report too many things at once. Tables generally have a standard format. The things you want to report information about

are on the left side of the table, and the features that you want to report on labeled across the top or bottom. Reference the appendix for a sample table.

Maps

Maps best demonstrate information as it relates to streets, landmarks and gaining an understanding of the community at large. Most people can understand issues better if they can see a map or chart that shows the conditions. Maps can be marked with symbols, or colors to show different conditions. For example, using colors on a map can easily illustrate the housing conditions by degree of problems. Reference the appendix for sample maps.

The size of the map scale depends on the size of the neighborhood and the size of the paper you wish to use in your final document. Generally, you will want to use the largest scale map you can when recording information (e.g., 1" = 200'). Whatever you use is likely to be reduced down when you print it. For much of the data you might want to show, a street map will suffice. This shows the outline of each block. Sometimes you need a more detailed map, such as a parcel map that shows the size and shape of each parcel of land and the outline (footprint) of the structure that sits upon it.

How one actually displays information on a map depends on the data to be shown and how fancy you wish to get. Colored markers do a wonderful job for many kinds of data. For example, three colors for three levels of housing conditions, varied colors for land use categories (standardized), and different thicknesses of streets depending on traffic volume work well to demonstrate the information you are trying to get across.

Often just circling some site and writing in some words can tell the story. Arrows effectively show the direction of bicycle traffic or special views. Arrows are also often used to show problem areas, (e.g., business encroachment on a residential neighborhood). Please reference the appendix for a sample base map, land use map, zoning map, and general plan map.

Visual Displays

Other techniques include photographs, freehand sketches, and videotaping. Each have their individual advantages in relaying important information. Photographs help to record the existing conditions and can document some of the highlights of a neighborhood. Sketches are effective in communicating a concept you wish to focus on, without being clouded by other details. Videotaping can construct an eye-opening tour of the neighborhood, or a survey of different housing styles.

Identifying Issues

With all the above information collected, analyzed, and displayed, it will not take much effort to identify the key issues the Neighborhood Plan will address. Examples of how they might be stated are:

- *Northwest corner of the neighborhood is starting to show signs of housing deterioration*
- *Heavy traffic along Rancho Drive endangers kids walking home from Wasden Elementary School.*
- *Neighborhood lacks enough small, retail shops to satisfy most day-to-day needs.*
- *Historic structures along 9th Street are vital assets in that they typify what the neighborhood's character is.*
- *Population of the neighborhood is aging, and many elderly lack ability to keep up their homes; also services for them are too far away.*
- *Many properties are being used in ways that conflict with the present zoning.*
- *With rapid population turnover, a sense of community has not been maintained.*

Notice that the issue statements do not yet imply any specific goal, let alone any proposed action to meet the goal. They are neutral statements of existing situations, usually stated as problems or at least challenges, affecting large numbers of people. They may even be statements about positive situations which need support or preservation. Each of them could call forth from the residents varied goal statements and then more varied actions. That part is still to

come. These issues typically get identified at a public meeting, after mountains of information have been presented to the attendees. Perhaps a survey had been done, on which respondents also had the chance to identify issues. Whatever means had been used up to this point, all the issues are then pulled together in a comprehensive list.

The value of identifying these neutrally stated issues is that it may prove easier to get consensus on them than on the goals, which you will be taking up next. If you jump straight from the data to your goals, you are likely to see divisiveness on goals because different residents are in effect defining the issue differently. So, look at the data, then identify issues, then move on to goals. Achieving consensus on the issues should help keep the team together as it moves on to goal setting.

Second Neighborhood Meeting

After the Planning Team has collected sufficient data about various neighborhood issues, a second open neighborhood meeting will be conducted. The purpose of this meeting is to give a progress report to the neighborhood. The Neighborhood Planning Team will also discuss the issues identified to date and seek additional input from the neighborhood.

Progress Report to the Neighborhood

At the second neighborhood meeting, the Neighborhood Planning Team will be responsible for presenting the progress that has been made to date. This will include the preliminary data and information that has been collected, the schedule of events, and any other pertinent information directly related to the development of a neighborhood plan. Accordingly, the second neighborhood meeting will be the opportunity for the Neighborhood Planning Team to solicit public input, comments and feedback on the collected information and address any concerns on the planning process.

Validate Issues

The community must come to consensus on all the issues that have been identified to this point. Additionally, the community will be given

the opportunity to provide input into the process and present additional issues the neighborhood plan should address. The information collected at the second neighborhood meeting will be recorded and addressed in the development of the neighborhood plan. Once the issues have been validated by the community, the Neighborhood Planning Team will be responsible for incorporating the information.

Develop the Plan

Now the fun begins. Once the issues have been identified, it is time to devise goals, strategies, and specific actions to address the issues.

Develop Goals

Goals are broad sweeping statements of what the neighborhood wants to accomplish. It is important to remember that goal statements should be short, consist of only one main thought, feature an action word and **not** specify how the goal will be accomplished.

For example:

Goal 1- Develop a clearer, more unified image for the neighborhood.

Goal 2 - Increase recreational opportunities for youth within the neighborhood.

Write your goals in general terms so you can look at several possible solutions. These goals will guide the improvements you make, so be sure they reflect the views of neighborhood residents. Discuss the goals in an environment where everyone affected can talk about his or her feelings. Listen to what people say and come to an agreement on what the group wants to accomplish.

No group has the time, money or energy to deal with every neighborhood problem. Groups must set priorities in order of importance. An effective way to set priorities is to start by collecting information on a wide range of neighborhood needs. This will give you a foundation for setting and prioritizing goals for each area of need. This strategy provides long term benefits to your

neighborhood planning process. Not only does it give you a starting point to focus on, but it keeps your work on schedule, and helps you to implement your action plan more effectively.

Formulate Recommendations

Now that you have decided what you want to accomplish, you are ready to begin discussion on some ways to reach your goals and to develop recommendations to implement your goals. The recommendations in neighborhood plans usually take the form of strategies, action items and maps.

Strategies are the generalized actions to be followed to achieve each of the goals. In turn the action items are the steps required to implement the strategy.

For example:

Goal 1- Develop a clearer, more unified image for the neighborhood.

Strategy - Adopt a name, motto, and logo for the neighborhood.

Action - Conduct a contest for name, motto and logo, open to all residents of the neighborhood.

For any goal, there are an infinite number of ways of reaching it. It is important for the Neighborhood Planning team to explore various ways to reach the goal. One way to do this is to meet in a group and list as many solutions as possible. The trick is to brainstorm many ideas, good or bad, without discussing any of them in detail. Even a bad idea may spark a thought that will lead to a workable solution.

Once you have a list, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each solution. This discussion helps narrow the choices down to a few solutions that can be discussed in depth. Once subjected to close scrutiny, many of those ways will drop out of the running, but it is important to give consideration to several ways of reaching a goal before settling on one.

For example:

Goal 2 - *Increase recreational opportunities for youth within the neighborhood.*

Alternative Strategies:

- 1. Apply for city funds to expand the offerings at the local community center.*
- 2. Create a new nonprofit organization which will then raise funds to start a program.*
- 3. Work with the schools to use those facilities for after-hours programs.*
- 4. Encourage private businesses to open more pools, bowling alleys, and other facilities.*

In addition to the **strategies** and **action items**, the Neighborhood Planning Team will want to prepare maps that show proposed changes. Examples of the maps are:

- **proposed land use** (e.g., designate a transitioning corridor as commercial)
- **proposed rezoning** (e.g., redesignate a warehouse area currently zoned light industrial to commercial)
- **proposed transportation system** (e.g., designate new bicycle routes)
- **proposed housing plan** (e.g., identify vacant area for multi-family residential)
- **proposed community facilities** (e.g., indicate possible site for new senior center)
- **proposed urban design plan** (e.g., identify a gateway to the neighborhood or designate specific streets for tree planting)

Create Action Plan (Implementation Program)

The final step in the plan's development is to organize the proposed projects into a sequence that extends throughout the life of the plan. This is known as an action plan and is a method in which to state what projects are most important to the neighborhood or identify those which must be carried out before others are possible. Please reference the appendix for a sample Neighborhood Action Plan.

The typical tools that cities use to implement plans are through the city's budget for capital investments, usually called the capital improvement plan (CIP); and controls on land use (e.g., such as zoning and other means); and federal grants/programs.

City spending on capital improvements covers such items as streets, sewers, schools, public buildings, and the like. Where the City decides to spend money for sewers can shape where new development will occur. On that same note, how moneys are allocated for housing rehabilitation can heavily influence whether a declining neighborhood will be revitalized. Neighbors wishing to get a plan implemented are well advised to learn the city's budgeting process, and when and how citizens can influence it. Like the budget, land use decisions can be influenced by citizen actions. Land use controls include:

- Zoning - says how a parcel of land is to be used
- Subdivision regulations - dictates how land may be subdivided for new developments
- Site plan review - regulates details in the plans of major development, such as shopping centers or multifamily complexes.
- Design review - regulates some aspects of the aesthetics of buildings
- Historic preservation - attempts to prevent the loss of architecturally or historically significant structures.

Neighborhood Planning and Support staff can present to a Neighborhood Planning Team on how each of these processes work within the City of Las Vegas.

Informal Review by City Departments

The planning team will submit the draft plan to the Neighborhood Services Department to be distributed to all appropriate City departments for an informal review. This is a courtesy review by all appropriate agencies to review for accurate information, content and additional information that may be needed. Each department will review the draft plan and provide written comments within 30 days.

The courtesy review is an ideal opportunity for the Neighborhood Planning Team to be informed of any potential problems and/or conflicts the neighborhood plan may contain. In turn, the Neighborhood Planning Team can address, clarify and correct (if necessary) any information that has been misrepresented. Once an amended draft is complete, the Neighborhood Planning Team will begin preparing for the third neighborhood meeting to gain the neighborhood's endorsement.

Third Neighborhood Meeting - Endorsement

For a neighborhood plan to have legal status, it needs to be adopted by both the Planning Commission and City Council. Before you even approach these bodies, it is crucial that the neighborhood support the plan. Of course, if you have had involvement through the planning process itself and have made public presentations of early drafts of the plan, you are half-way there.

When preparing for the third neighborhood meeting, be sure that a few people are well rehearsed to present it clearly and effectively. In addition, disseminate the plan, or a concise summary of it, widely within the neighborhood including residents, public officials, neighborhood institutions, and the media. It is also helpful to prepare or help reporters to prepare articles about the neighborhood plan in citywide newspapers. Letters of endorsement of the plan from residents, organizations, businesses, and neighborhood institutions are also good tools to use in promoting your accomplishment.

The Neighborhood Planning Team will host this neighborhood meeting to present the final draft of the neighborhood plan to the neighborhood at large. The neighborhood must endorse the draft document before it is submitted for final reviews by the City of Las Vegas.

Formal Reviews

Formal Review by Other City Departments

After the team and the neighborhood have endorsed the draft plan, Neighborhood Services will submit to the Planning Department for distribution to appropriate City departments for final review and comment. Comments will be collected and reviewed with the Planning Team by the Planning Department. Once all comments are adequately addressed, the Planning Department will schedule the plan for review by the Planning Commission.

Informal Briefings with the Planning Commission

The Neighborhood Planning Team shall then brief the Planning Commission on the plan along with comments from City planning staff. If the Commission so directs, the team shall also brief other City Commissions.

Final Draft Preparation

After considering comments made by City departments, Commissions, etc., the Planning Team will prepare a final draft plan. During plan preparation, the Neighborhood Planning Team will coordinate with Neighborhood Services Department staff to incorporate necessary suggestions into the plan.

Public Hearings

Public Hearing by the Planning Commission

The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the final draft plan. This public hearing will be held within 90 days after the plan is forwarded to the Planning Commission.

Recognition by the Planning Commission

The Planning Commission will then consider recognition of the Neighborhood Plan for inclusion as an addendum to the Neighborhood Planning Component of the General Plan. The Commission shall act on the recognition of the plan within 30 days after the public hearing.

Evaluation of the Neighborhood Planning Process

The Commission will evaluate the process to develop the plan in order to determine that the following requirements have been met:

- Three open neighborhood meetings were held and all major interest groups in the neighborhood had the opportunity to participate at the meetings. Notification for the three open meetings satisfied the standards outlined in this process.
- The Neighborhood Planning Team was approved by the Director of Neighborhood Services. The Neighborhood Planning Area and time line for plan development were selected in consultation with the Director of Neighborhood Services.
- The Neighborhood Planning Team adhered to the approved timeline for plan development.
- Appropriate City departments, boards and commissions reviewed and commented on pertinent sections of the plan.
- A public hearing with proper notification was held before the Planning Commission.

The Planning Commission will also evaluate the plan's content in order to determine that the following standards have been met:

- The plan's goals and recommendations are consistent with adopted city policies, plans and regulations, including but not limited to the following: the City's General Plan, the Master Plan of Streets and Highways, Parks Master Plan, and other recognized Neighborhood Plans; Title 19A; and Capital Improvement Program. The neighborhood's recommended changes to City policies, plans or regulations are identified and differentiated with brackets or special lettering. In the event of an inconsistency between the General Plan and the proposed Neighborhood Plan, the Commission

should consider initiation of an amendment to the General Plan or amendments to the Neighborhood Plan.

- Comments and recommendations from City departments and agencies have been incorporated or otherwise addressed in the plan.
- Implementation of the plan's recommended policies and projects will achieve the plan's stated goals and objectives.
- Areas of the plan that address issues outside the City's jurisdiction are identified and differentiated with brackets or special lettering.

As an addendum to the Neighborhood Planning component of the General Plan, the Neighborhood Plan must be recognized by the Planning Commission before it is forwarded to the City Council. If the plan is not acceptable to the Planning Commission, it shall be returned to the Planning Team with a written explanation. The explanation shall identify the requirements and/or standards not met by the plan and a procedure for the Neighborhood Planning Team to follow and to make certain the plan complies with the requirements and/or standards.

Public Hearing by City Council

When a Neighborhood Plan has followed the Neighborhood Planning Process and has been approved by the Planning Commission, it will then be forwarded to the City Council for a public hearing. The City Council will hold a public hearing on the final draft plan with the recommendation of the Planning Commission as outlined above. The City Council will evaluate the process used to develop the plan as well as the plans content to ensure the adopted standards and procedures were followed. In turn, the City Council will consider recognition of the Neighborhood Plan as an addendum to the Neighborhood Planning Component of the General Plan.

Recognition by City Council

The City Council will then consider a resolution including the plan as a recognized addendum to the Neighborhood Planning component of the General Plan. At this time, if there are inconsistencies between the General Plan and the proposed Neighborhood Plan, the Council will consider proposed amendments to the General Plan or amendments to the Neighborhood Plan to ensure consistency with the two documents.

Plan Distribution

If the City Council recognizes the Neighborhood Plan, it will be distributed by the Neighborhood Services Department, to all affected City Commissions, Boards and Departments.

Significance of a Neighborhood Plan

Adoption of a Neighborhood Plan by the Planning Commission and City Council as an addendum to the Neighborhood Planning component of the General Plan is a means of certification, signifying that:

- The plan was properly researched and developed to achieve stated goals and recommendations, using adopted City policies, plans and regulations.
- The plan was developed in an open and representative manner, providing an opportunity for all major interest groups in the neighborhood to participate.
- The plan's information, goals and recommendations are a definite statement of neighborhood conditions and opinions and should be consulted as such by the City Council, the Planning Commission and City departments during the course of the decision-making process.

If a plan has been properly developed, in an open and participatory manner, the Planning Commission and City council adoption signifies that the plan is a legitimate expression of neighborhood opinion. Thus the plan becomes a position statement for the neighborhood to use

before policy-making bodies. It also becomes an information source which any public or private group should consult as an accurate reflection of what the neighborhood thinks about a proposed project or policy.

In regard to the significance of plan recommendations, recognition does not necessarily mean a City commitment to action or implementation of a plan's projects or policies. Plan recognition does not mean that the City has adopted neighborhood plan projects or policies as the City's projects or policies. The City Council and Planning Commission may agree in principle with a plan recommendation for a particular project or policy, but implementation of such recommendations may not be currently feasible or legally possible.

Plan recognition does not imply that the City Council or Planning Commission has assigned priority to the plan's recommendations. While clearly important to the neighborhood, these recommendations may not warrant priority when compared to similar projects elsewhere in the City. It remains the task of the neighborhood to use the plan as an informational tool with Council and Commissions.

Finally, the adoption of a plan signifies a formal acknowledgment of a plan's development. Usually a great deal of citizen time and energy is invested in the Neighborhood Planning Process. The process creates a group of neighborhood spokespersons who know a great deal about their neighborhood and their plan recommendations, and they understand the workings of the City government and its limitations. This planning achievement by citizens is commended by the Planning Commission and City Council through plan adoption.